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MEDUSA

A MOONSHINE MELODY

By JO M. KENDALL
Former M. C. (Ky.)

For kisses are like poppies spread,
You seize the victim, the kiss is shed;
John felt on his cheek the veriest feather
E'er flung from wild pigeon on mountain heather.

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"My foot is on my native heath, and my name is MacGregor." — *Rob Roy*

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She was a child of the forest and drew her looks
From laurel leaves and babbling brooks.
In all his travels he saw no such clothes
For in pure white she was the heart o' a rose.

MEDUSA

A MOONSHINE MELODY

A MOUNTAIN EPITAPH.

A true story of a Wonderful Woman, Moonshine and War. A rare bit of sentiment and a gem of purest ray serene.

Medusa sold Moonshine 'til her time was spent,
Then she kicked up her heels and away she went.

She suffered little and when she was dead
They found a gallon hid beneath her bed.

Neath the shadows of Big Black mountain she rests
quiet and cool,
Not far removed from the Pine Mountain Settlement
School,

While just over the ridge at the Wolf's Three Fork
Lives the finest World Warrior, Sergeant Alvin
York;

Since that war is won and he's back home "Ouch"
Has turned his attention to the nuptial couch.

The Governor of Tennessee performed the service gay
And Alvin went ahead, there was nothing to pay.

The Governor enjoyed it, he just lounged 'round,
The thousands assembled sat and ate on the ground,

They looked at Alvin and wondered why
His step was so light and his look was so high.

The bride blushed crimson in becoming gown,
The sweetest thing Alvin had ever yet found;

A captivating maid in both manner and dress
With a total lack of self-consciousness.

The Governor said that the beauties of France
Had not won from Alvin one admiring glance,

But that brave and loyal as he would ever be
He found the fairest flower in sunny TennOsee.

I witnessed the ceremony from far up in a tree.
If I told all I saw Alvin might shoot me;

The Governor in sympathy would pardon York
And commend his shot as right good sport.

It gives me infinite pleasure to blow York's horn
For he, like Sandlin and McCoy, is a K'y'n born.

A Kentuckian once remarked, one with a mental dome,
Other States led Ky. under K'y'ns who failed at home,

The Blue Grass and State Fairs paid and did well
Thru the patronage of the engaging John Shell.

With his 137 years, and a conscience like a girl,
Is reputed the oldest young man in the world;

The press and science with discussion was torn
Since no one remembered the day Shell was born.

He protested vehement with the wisdom of a sage
That the wrinkles on a horn are no criterion of age,

Then he took the position that he would far rather
Be esteemed years younger than to bother his father.

A typical mountain family numbering eleven,
The youngest a bright boy age only seven;

This bright boy should have been a fine girl
And showed for the best thing we beat the world.

Shell capped the climax on Fair day the third
When he arose in the air and flew like a bird,

Which suggested to a bunch of Revenue old liners
That Shell in an airplane could capture Moon-
shiners;

When he came back and lit he was ready to die
Since he'd witnessed by man the conquest of the sky.

While Sandlin the Soldier with pure main strength
To eradicate illiteracy went his full length;

This highland eagle, without learning or dollars,
Did more for literacy than all our erudite scholars.

While down in Louisville, entranced, the very elite
With the exploits of Black Hawk and Pistol Pete;

Their loose talk about bold, bad Breathitt is pure
fudge,
They break the monotony shooting both Attorney
and Judge.

Medusa was wise and was heard to declare
"The farther from the Court House the safer you
are."

But back to Medusa for you have had enough
Diversified, mutilated, Moonshine stuff,

It is my purpose so long as I sing
To give to my audience the very pure thing.

The March wind blew loud, hard and rough,
Altho a full gallon it was hardly enough.

She sold for years all sorts of booze,
Yet was too darn sly for the Revenoos.

Tho oft compelled to jew and dicker,
She neither sold nor served any potash licker,

She sold to all nor turned her back
Nor had recourse to the Tiger's clack;

She stayed at home and had such art
She never acted the bootlegger's part.

The stranger knew both far and wide
That her latch-string hung on the outside.

The gallant Cavalier, the Kentucky Troubadour,
Spurred to reach at sunset her little cottage door;

He came adorned with jockey hat and feather
And Medusa and Cavalier looked well together.

He was entertained for a single night
In her spare room, fresh, virginal and white.

Where he dreamed of Medusa, so neat and light,
Like a big white dove poised for flight:

For she had the gift, a gift o' sense,
Of looking smart at a small expense.

In all his travels he saw no such clothes
For in pure white she was the heart o' a rose.

He vowed in earnest as sure as she was born
That when adorned the least she did most adorn;

And yet she knew that fine feathers did
Enhance the charms they draped and hid,

That man's heart beat faster and blood congealed
When clothes displayed what clothes concealed.

That in love's trial the verdict or election
Went not to fair face or form but to suggestion;

In the thing called "charm" the grace most fine
Lay vaguely concealed in the Serpentine.

The Cavalier would oft remark with hilarious glee
That her dress was a dream and her hat was a spree.

Neath the shadows of Big Black Mountain she rests quiet and cool.

Fun might be had he explained with thou,
A cake and a jug underneath a bough;

That the Bird of Time is a fleeting fellow,
That fruits should be tasted when ripe and mellow.

Then he ventured words of endearment dear
Which chaste Medusa would not hear.

His one resolve the whole year round
Was never to turn a good thing down.

Above all others she had the gift to please
Doing a difficult thing with contemptible ease.

She once remarked, "I'm like the Turk.
I think continually but I never work."

We trusted her and she trusted us
And no one ever started anything.

When Medusa spoke we had no choice.
She ruled the rudest without raising her voice.

Her sire before her ere she was born
Had toted to the grist his sprouted corn,

His grandsire had quit the Scotch hills under ban
To escape the vigilance of the hated excise man:

And hoped in Kentucky, free and new
To brew unmolested his Mountain Dew.

On the roll of Scotch excise appears in turns
The illustrious name of bright Bobby Burns,

Whose wild dissipation and a too generous giving
Was forced to chase 'Shiners to earn a precarious
living.

On the subject of Suffrage she was no bluffer
But believed that women like men ought to suffer,

But that for the Garden of Eden episode
We might have less fun but be perfectly good;

That fashion and folly had united to bruit,
The foliage is now more important than the fruit,

That but for Temptation, in Medusa's fair eyes,
Virtue would die for the want of exercise,

That rather than pray to be delivered from the devil
Better meet Temptation half way and subdue the evil.

She divined that, not to protest, too insistent,
Satan was never so perverse, persevering and persistent.

She opposed Prohibition, she thought it not best,
To put long-green for comfort and the grave for rest.

A prohibitionist flew into Medusa's back yard
And talked and talked 'til his voice got hard,

He talked and talked and his eyes did swell,
He won't utter another word 'till his throat gets well.

Medusa observed that barring an occasional detention
It left the Mountains and Chicago without competition.

Sprung from a race of warriors all,
She loved to list to the clan's clear call,

To watch the Gathering of son and sire
When flew the Signal, the Cross of Fire.

A preacher's daughter, she cherished his diction,
But believed Moonshine a not unmixed affliction.

A very bright woman at the very top notch,
She used no such words as "youens" and "fotch,"

With broad smile and humor she alluded to it,
Author Cox said, "You know," Preacher Jo Call said "Hit."

Cox drew a picture of mountain character fine,
Call garnished his sermons with potations of Moonshine,

Comparisons are odious but the truth of the fact is
Call stuck closer to his text than Cox did to his.

Better be a bullfrog and bellow on the banks of Big Sandy
Than pollute the sacred truth with indifferent apple brandy.

She held in calibre of very small size
Those who do, what Woodrow dare not, patronize.

This speech stamped Woodrow in Medusa's mind
As a matchless Thinker, the Man of all Time.

That those who write us up are like the daw,
Visiting the streets of Green, Megowan and Craw,

That the base of Mountain Fiction is not sound
Nor their observations either wise or profound;

That in highland romance the reader's elation
Arose not from fixed fact but exaggeration,

That they left the feeling, at least to one.
Of a rather nice thing completely overdone.

The Mountains only ask from the literary hummer,
Justice, for which every place is a temple, all seasons summer.

Tho an outlying province and rude in their ways
They furnished two Governors in about 90 days,

Who with Menefee, Elliott and others, each a silver tongue,
Furnish an enduring memorial when her praises are sung.

Of Mountaineers whose fame will outlast granite
The greatest are those who were the hills incarnate,

They, too, loved the hills, sun, scenic and air
And proudest of one thing, that they mountaineers were.

She esteemed as soft, deluded and visionary
Those who thought we needed a Mountain Missionary,

That the samples sent impelled her to reason
Not to be a Christian but remain a heathen.

That in her opinion the community little got
From a wandering banjo-picker or a sanctified sot,

A student of human nature she discovered quick
Whether he was really religious or only sick.

On her way from church she hummed the 5th Noctrin
And praised the efficacy of the Hard-shell doctrin,

That these new easy routes to the Heavenly station
Might strain but not break her Plan of Salvation.

In most of these schemes to escape the wages of sin
The sinner came out of the same hole that he went in.

Her father was bright, she called him "Honey"
But wished he loved learning less and had more money,

She admitted reluctant there are things better than money

Among them maple syrup and a sort of saved, wild honey,

She held in contempt those who to win fame
Give to a modest little flower a great big name,

She argued that custom settled the point
That a big name put a little flower out o' joint.

Her English was chaste, to her rocks were rocks,
She was not equaled even by the noted John Cox.

She detested hot buscuit and when left alone
She rigidly adhered to the old corn pone,

And esteemed the best diet for muscle, nerve and head
In hog-killin' time to be the rich cracklin' bread;

But beaten buscuit were not rank secession
When employed exclusively as a Sabbath concession,

That a razor-back hog ham when properly basted
Is the sweetest meat mortal man ever smelt or tasted,

Tho in sweet summer she despised the litter
Ben had to bend to the old tin gritter.

She worked and schemed of her own volition
For exercise kept her in fine condition,

She banished dark thoughts and said the finicky
In fluctuating fields finally found felicity.

In health she held that there should be reserves
For Moonshine is a delicious relaxation for nerves,

That to be unemployed always made her dizzy
The wise thing worth while is keeping busy.

She vowed that biography showed an appetite burning
In most bright men for liberty, licker and learning.

When she ventured an opinion her quiet, easy diction
Showed her to be in touch with the best late fiction.

Her Speech, like silver, sparkled and glistened.
The Cardinal hopped nearer, held his breath, and listened.

To me who heard her, I can't tell how,
I felt like a bird on a bounding bough.

Like the Divine Sarah, tho far more young,
She wielded a soft, sharp, silver tongue,

Who knew her gifts were at a loss to tell
Why she spoke so little who talked so well.

For the Kentucky Orator, the less he knows,
The louder he hollers and the more he blows.

Our wise and great with tongue and pen
Have been mild-mannered, modest men.

She said the Mountains in their sorest need
Found their best old stock had gone to seed;

Her reason for this, she was impelled to utter,
Was because they were raised on thin white butter.

She said that if able she'd act a great part
And dedicate her life completely to art;

She reverenced the past and took the ground
There were more arts lost than had been found,

That in her eyes the finest dope
Is to give to another a ray of hope,

Then she would quietly add with a laugh
Those who do not must stand the gaff,

In spite of her calling in all the State
Lived few less subtle and intuitively great.

She loved the hills, their simple cheer,
Nor ever cared to rove elsewhere.

She showed good sense and thought it fine
To live her own life far off the main line.

Tho far removed from road, school and steeple
She preferred to dwell among her own people,

In this position she was more than mere human
And unconsciously resembled the Shunamite
Woman.

Tho filled with high thoughts of fashion and advance
She had been caught in the trap of circumstance,

Tho wine, want and woe turned her heart to stone
She only asked to be let alone.

A child of the forest, she drew her looks
From laurel leaves and babbling brooks.

She mixed with men and tho Temptation tossed
She drew a straight line none ever crossed;

She never in life, not even perchance,
Talked Tom-fool nonsense nor took a chance.

Her eyes were dark, her complexion like lard,
Her mouth was little and her conscience hard.

She was a woman of parts and knew her duty
Was not to traffic on her youth and beauty,

That the truly great love to the average human
Came to some not at all and but once to a woman.

That studying one's self is an important feature
But that the other fellow is far the best teacher,

That misfortune will come but it is a fact
You're all right if your conscience is intact.

It is not fair in love or an election
To use soft soap or traffic in affection,

A clear conscience alone gives true thrills
And brings joy coming right over the hills:

They pay the fiddler who choose to dance,
It isn't every one gets a second chance,

That never in life had her invention
Entertained for a moment a sly intention.

That those who do are less wise than kind
And invariably possess a mean little mind.

In all business be brief and brisk
Tell the truth and take no risk.

The truth will live without exemption
A lie puts a person past redemption.

One thing should be taught to every girl
That the truth alone can fool the world.

To explain this riddle might take a day
Like "from him who has not it shall be taken away:"

While "to those who have," it makes us sore.
The promise is that they shall get more.

To come to the point I will simply say
Truth lives eternal and a lie don't pay.

This conclusion may cause a sly one to sigh
The wise will take heed and never live a lie.

That to be happy the wise man must
Take what he gets in faith and trust.

A Moonshine Woman thru and thru.
She saved the life of a Revenoo.

And led him safe thru pass and ward
Far past Clan-Cumberland's outmost guard.

She led him safe thru glen and brae
To where the Moonshiner dare not stray.

And tho it took her a night and a day
She obstinately refused to accept any pay;

And only asked for her own clan
He'd do the like for a banished man.

His grandsire had quit the Scotch hills under ban,
To escape the vigilance of the hated excise man;
And hoped in Kentucky free and new,
To brew unmolested his mountain dew

For her husband Ben, in durance vile
In a Federal jail, was a forced exile.

She fondly hoped that to ease her heart's burn
He would open the path to his happy return.

For like a caged hawk she knew that Ben
From an eagle to a buzzard would turn in the pen.

That for her ennui Ben was a sure cure,
He was as sure as slow and as slow as sure;

To him she felt quite awfully grateful
That he was as stupid as he was faithful.

During all her life, tho provoked perchance,
Ben had not an ugly word nor an unwifely glance,

That after Ben had gone and left her
She strolled thro the glade, a sad-eyed heifer.

That while he was in no wise distinguished
When he left the light of her life was extinguished,

That for consolation, the best at that,
Was to read, con and ponder her Rubiayat.

She owed more to this one thin book of Omar
Than to all the voluminous volumes of Homer.

She took scant stock in Omar's rhyme
About drinking wine and killing time,

That in literature a priceless dower
"Is to wear learning lightly like a flower."

To wander on the hills and take a look at
What she loved, the red leaves of the sumach.

But sad to relate the Revenue man, alas!
Forgot the woman who had passed him past,

He drank her booze and went his way
And Ben had to serve to his last day.

Swift retribution came to Donald Dhu,
The very next raid he never got thru,

The Chiefs that day in force at noon
Had marshalled on the braes of Coon.

Medusa told them of Donald Dhu,
Of how the path she'd led him thru,

Then she told what was known to a few
Of what Donald promised and didn't do.

So quiet and cool and yet even the stranger
Knew that masked look meant imminent danger,

The vote was taken, the die was cast
And Donald Dhu had lived his last.

Her low voice died on the wind like a lyre
When away from the heath sped the Cross of Fire,

From hill and mountain far and near
The Clan's shrill Gathering could Medusa hear.

From Devil's creek, Cutshin and Roarin' Fork
The 'Shiners were "up" for bloody work,

Each hill and vale was rampant rife
With long-haired warriors armed for strife;

And mingling above both peak and stream
Was heard the boding eagle scream,

From crag to crag the Signal flew
No rest the Cumberland echoes knew.

Watch-fires gleamed, fox-horns blew
And what would happen, Medusa knew.

The Mountaineer ne'er in battle stood
But first his rifle tasted blood,

No mountain people in civil or martial jar
Were ever bought in peace or whipt in war.

Down in a dark, sequestered dell
The Marshal bravely fought and fell,

And still the Donald banner flew
While his red blood did blot the dew;

It seemed that all the fiends of hell
Had mustered in that lonely dell.

The posse sensed unequal fight
And eased the game by precipitate flight,

They deemed themselves both happy and lucky
To escape from the hottest spot in all Kentucky.

The night hawk screamed and back from the hill
Came the lonesome call of the whip'or'will,

And silence settled like a fog on a rill
Thru which curled the smoke of a Moonshine Still.

Future ages will wonder when they courage seek
How Kentucky met Kentucky and Greek met Greek,

In tradition and legend the whole world round
She is famed as the Dark and Bloody Ground.

Thru all this commotion, quake and qualm
Medusa was quiet and amazingly calm,

When the sun cleared the fog out from the gloom
Emerged Ben's sardonic face and conquering eagle plume.

The great, gray rocks echoed a free, wild yell
That died in the dingle where the dauntless Donald fell.

They buried him there and the complaining brook
Bore his sad story to the land he forsook,

No flower o' affection was cast on his grave
But above the tall poplar did proudly wave.

Medusa smiled for she did not care
For a man who forgot a favor rare,

She remarked in tone cool, quiet and sharp
That Donald had left and gone after his harp.

The tale is told in mountain song
How Clan-Cumberland righted a wrong.

In the Woods o' Wrath there is no such fire
As vengance kindling mountain ire.

His comrades came from a far-off town
And took him away from the mountains brown,

Whose tawny colors and falling leaf
Gave added pathos to this epic o' grief.

They crossed the turgid Cumberland river
As rich in romance as the Gaudelquiver,

And then the Kentucky, like unto the Doon,
To where rest the ashes of back-woodsman Boon.

And told wild stories fresh from the border
How a hero died for law and order,

And vowed that on another day
Clan-Cumberland would have to pay,

Of rumored raids and civil jar
That presaged the dawn of mountain war;

That a whirlwind would sweep the moonshine swarm
And put their leaders where they could do no harm.

John Cox wrote the story with a pen, not a sword,
While Medusa filled for him her small, slim gourd,

And blushed as she fetched it, looking down,
Which made John forget he was due in town;

John thanked her so warmly she looked askance
And John went off in a Moonshine trance,

John had gone off in this same trance
When Ben played and Medusa danced.

Widely cultured in music John was forced to conclude,

That the Moonshine Minstrel beat the Blue Grass Dude,

For the Moonshiner can play to beat the band
When the licker's in the head and the bow's in the hand;

John regarded Ben as a social carbuncle,
Men with merry wives call everybody "Uncle,"

John counted it a new commandment of life
If you can't love your neighbor then love his wife.

He told her in words, admiring and bold,
She didn't look a day over fourteen years old,

He viewed her fine, commanding carriage
And wished there was no such thing as marriage;

She treated John and his declension
With a manner of faintly amused condescension.

John could not talk, he could only stammer,
The too faithful victim of Medusa's glamour,

John's thoughts were as pure as mountain dew
He loved like the devil and his words were few.

She was puzzled to conjecture if in her eyes
Lurked invitation to masculine enterprise.

She proposed to John with a merry laugh
To guide his feet along the hoe-down path,

She spoke of the fact that John in amene accordance
Opened the dance with her, the lady of first importance;

She secretly divined that John in these little vanities
Sought to assimilate her hitherto unsuspected mysteries.

That there is no such thrill a woman feels
When lads and lassies crack their heels,

That she would rather hear than dine
"Hop tight ladies and tip toe fine";

And above the laughin' and dancin' Ben's clear call
"Swing your partner and balance all."

That time would never to her forgetfulness bring
How he executed the crow-hop and cut the pigeon-wing,

That Ben's "Chicken in the bread tray, hop, hop, hop,"
Was as sweet as any music, even "pop, pop, pop."

That of all the dances she would always feel
She personally preferred the Old Virginia Reel,

That on occasion she could never forget
The attention, something distinguished, in the Minuet.

She ventured an opinion that these must not
Give way to the Bunny Hug and Turkey Trot,

She explained that a woman in her situation,
Must naturally be opposed to all innovation;

She complained next day that she was "all in,"
That dancing was her one besetting sin.

The night hawk screamed and back from the hill
Came the lonesome call of the whip 'or will.
And silence settled like a fog on a rill,
Thru which curled the smoke of a Moonshine still.

John's mind suddenly filled with a vision rank
When he recalled he was overdrawn at the bank;

But had not Ben come suddenly back
Blue Grass and Rhodo might have mingled, alack,

And Ben might have learned to his great grief
That opportunity and absence make the thief,

For of all the sad words of tongue or pen
To John, not Medusa, was "The Return of Ben";

For Ben was a Don Juan as well as John
And sensed he'd lost something by being gone.

For kisses are like poppies spread,
You seize the victim, the kiss is shed;

John felt on his cheek the veriest feather
E'er flung from wild pigeon on mountain heather.

When Ben came John went, well,
All was as merry as a marriage bell.

Medusa was wise and did simply say
That John's stories gave her a headache gray,

From the ranks who admired him she would step out
of line,

That compared to a classic they were diluted Moonshine;

He employed so many words in such a solemn manner,
To drive the point in would require a sledge hammer.

It takes ten pounds of common sense
To put a pound of learning over the fence.

Then she boldly declared that John was a prig,
Not natural, like the curl in the tail of a peach orchard pig,

That he had fame but even at that
He was little more than a cat-fish artistocrat;

That a mixed blooded people are naturally inferior,
That a pure blooded Mountaineer never saw a
superior.

She was not a fool and did not want it to appear
That John or anybody else was running after her,

No scandal for her, she liked garden sass,
For her grass widows might all go to grass.

She admitted, blushing to Ben and his friend Dan,
That John was a devil of a honey-tongued man;

That his manners were easy, his voice so suave,
His funniest stories made her feel quite grave,

That he was famous she was dumbfounded,
Of such illusions are fame and glory compounded.

That John had the gift, the gift of seeing,
Of treating a mountain woman like a human being.

Then she sighed and added "I never can
Love anybody else but a mountain man."

Then Ben put the question to Medusa, sighing,
"When a hen cackles is she laying or lying?"

Medusa suggested it would probably be best
The owner of the hen might examine her nest.

Then Ben hummed a tune sung thereabout,
"Every Time He Called Her Little Lamp Went Out."

Medusa shook her head and saith
"The deepest lines are carved by lack o' faith,"

Then she added "They say in the South
No one has a good name in a bad mouth."

Not for a million would she have her patron
Consider her a free and easy matron,

That John occupied too high a station
To yield to anything, much less Temptation;

That culture and pride impelled him to laugh
At the idea of pursuing the promrise path,

That those who persist in following such bent
Are consigned to the place where Ward's Ducks went,

Than to do such a thing one had far better be
With the gentleman named McGinty at the bottom
o' the sea.

Then she lifted up her clear cut chin
And gazed straight in the eyes of the sarcastic Ben,

"Since I have been a woman grown
What's never known is best unknown."

And then she spoke with a tear in her eye,
"How quick love goes once it begins to die;"

"Those who the joys of love have known
Pine with regret when they are gone."

Then she looked at her little wedding ring
That glistened like a tear to burn and sting,

"A man should think ere he struck the hand
That led him to such a rare and wondrous land"

That love is a flower, neglected it goes,
But tended it buds and blooms like a rose.

She added that Ben was quite a dear
If he didn't sometimes act so queer.

Then she suggested it was useless to wrangle
Over what John Cox called The Eternal Triangle.

And then she muttered "In conversation
A shut mouth is worth an hour's explanation,"

That of all people she would rather be one such
Who makes poor rhymes than talk too much.

This quiet remark without affectation
Relieved the strain and saved the situation.

John and Medusa couldn't help but show it
And, as usual, Ben was the last man to know it.

Then she shyly tickled Ben under the chin,
The rafters rang with an awful din,

And the passer heard the loud clear hiss
Of what must have been a scorching kiss.

The Court crowd smiled that afternoon
Observing that John was out o' tune,

His Honor remarked from his place on the Bench
That the Buck had been stalked by a Moonshine
Wench.

John thought of the Harpers proud and cold,
Of the Mountain Landlord who wanted gold,

So closing his heart John wrote on
And Medusa was left with Ben alone.

The landlord heard John jeer and laugh
To think he'd been caught by mountain riff raff,

That he, an author bright and sharp,
Should fall for the wife of a local harp;

And forget his calling, which was his duty,
To bow at the shrine of a sylvan beauty,

With eyes full of sunbeams and sinuous ease
When she hardly knew even her A B C's.

He raged and swore and cursed his luck
And felt he wasn't knee high to a duck,

And hied him away from glen and brae
To where more peaceful waters stray.

John looked back when he reached the station
And vowed that the Mountains beat the Nation.

He confided to his chum that he was only human
That he never met anything like this Mountain
Woman,

That never had he, since the sun for him had risen,
Pressed lip so sweet or held daintier hand in his'en,

Good gracious! how John's heart did burn,
When she held his'n and he held her'n.

The hearer doubted, he hadn't been there
He'd like to go but he did'nt care.

John said to the agent, and his words did burn,
"Tell Medusa I go but I return,"

Then he added, as he mended his gait,
"I've got to go, I can not wait."

Which caused the agent to quietly laugh,
Mistaking John for a backwoods, Moonshine calf.

John sat in the smoker and hummed as before
"I Believe In My Soul That I'd Wander No More,"

A Mountain folk song of wild disorder
To the tune of Blue Bonnets O'er the Border;

Sung ages ago by that old Scot Ghlu Dune
Now known in Kentucky as a Lonesome Tune.

He muttered aloud, the smoke did curl,
"This Mountain Woman is sure some girl,"

In all creation they beat the devil,
The hardest mystery to unravel.

The gift is not vouchsafed to man
The wish-bone woman to understand.

The complex mysteries of the human heart
Only a woman can appreciate, man lacks the art,

The human heart from its interior
Should always aspire to the superior.

In human fiction is no more vivid tale
Than that one of John, the thwarted male.

John forgot the "poor whites" who live in a rut
In the land of the still, the home of the nut.

On the tongue of tradition will be handed down
This exquisite story of Medusa and John,

Of how John lingered and well nigh strayed
With a Moonshine Woman, not a Mountain Maid;

With eyes like the sea and lips like wine
As straight as a shingle or a Lonesome Pine.

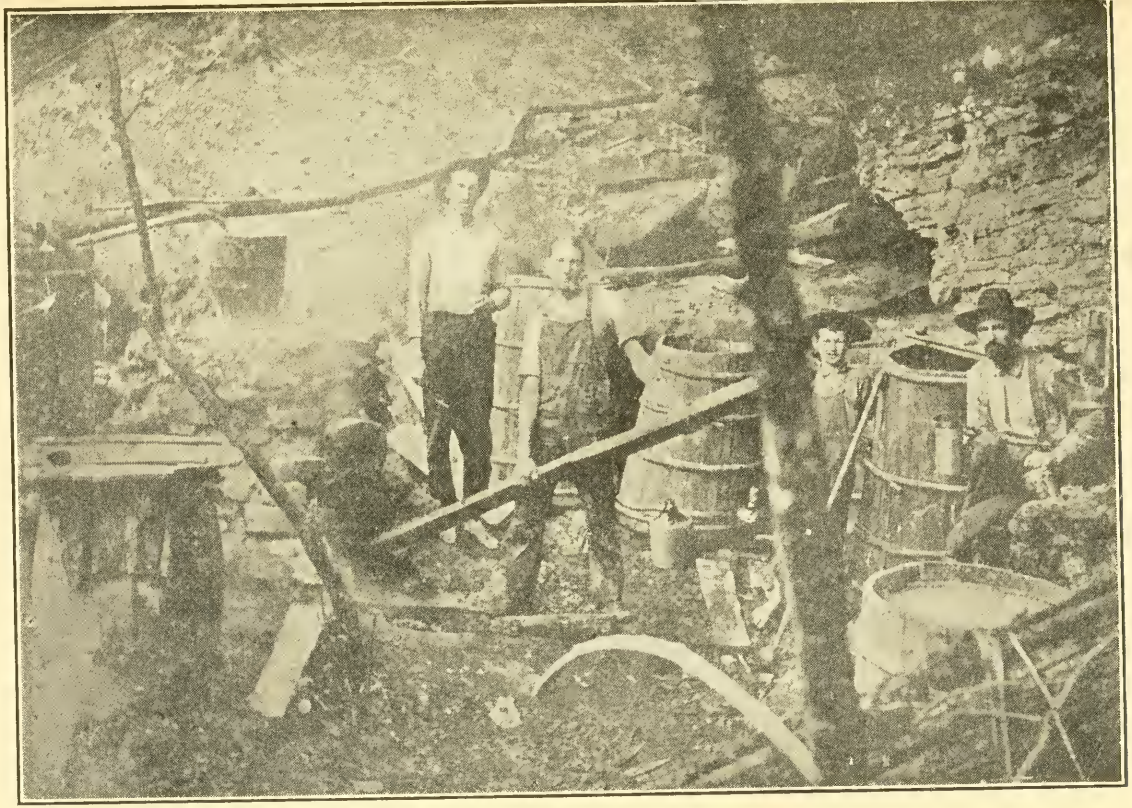
She knew that had she lost her heart in the strife
Something sweet and precious would have left her life,

That those who do tho outwardly calm
Inwardly suffer the tortures of the damned.

It may be true, all things that run are edible,
But sin leaves a stain not apparent but indelible.

Oft when alone would Medusa say
"I had a close call that unlucky day,"

Yet she schemed and fibbed as she was able,
Rather than lay all her cards on the table.



When the sun cleared the fog out from the gloom,
Emerged Ben's sardonic face and conquering eagle plume;
The great gray rocks echoed a free wild yell,
That died in the dingle where the dauntless Donald fell.

She had that doubting, anxious, hesitating way
That steals the unsophisticated man away;

Tho in no way a Vampire, schemer or plotter,
Men were like clay in the hands of the potter.

She had after she became a woman grown
No thirst for the knowledge that can never be known,

On her fair face and form she set no price
But stuck to business as more wise and nice.

Stick to your business, sit on the lid tight,
Eschew fashion and folly and you're all right.

It is probably near the truth to say
She liked both men in a different way,

Or to put it plainer, to please the bon ton,
That she loved Ben and admired John;

This statement may make the decorous start,
She seems to have possessed a forked heart,

She was like unto a Siamese dove,
One fork Friendship, the other fork Love,

I may explain to complete this song
That each long prong was equally long.

Ben finally concluded, it made him heart sick,
That she was not fast but that she was quick;

He only wished, as she was fresh and neat,
That she was as slow as she was sweet.

This is a story rarely told
But Medusa's gone and John is old.

John's account of this lone loon
Will rival the battle o' Be Al An Duine',

Wandering 'Shiners will stop and stray
To list to this artless Moonshine Lay,

And cluster about with ear and look intent
To this sweet, sad story, The Moonshiner's Lament.

A title first given where a jealous lass
Conducted the Marshal thru this same pass,

In dark midnight o'er rock and rill
To where her lover watched his still,

And stilled the watch with her wild "Halloo"
While Marshal and prisoner passed silently thru;

And traveled far o'er hill and dale
And lodged him safely in the Jackson jail,

Where he pined with love 'til his heart was rent
And he wrote the immortal Moonshiner's Lament.

Now heard in song, story, legend and dering do,
On fiddle and banjo, from the head of Beaver to the
Mouth O' Canoe.

She was a good woman and thru thick and thin
She was always constant and true to Bin,

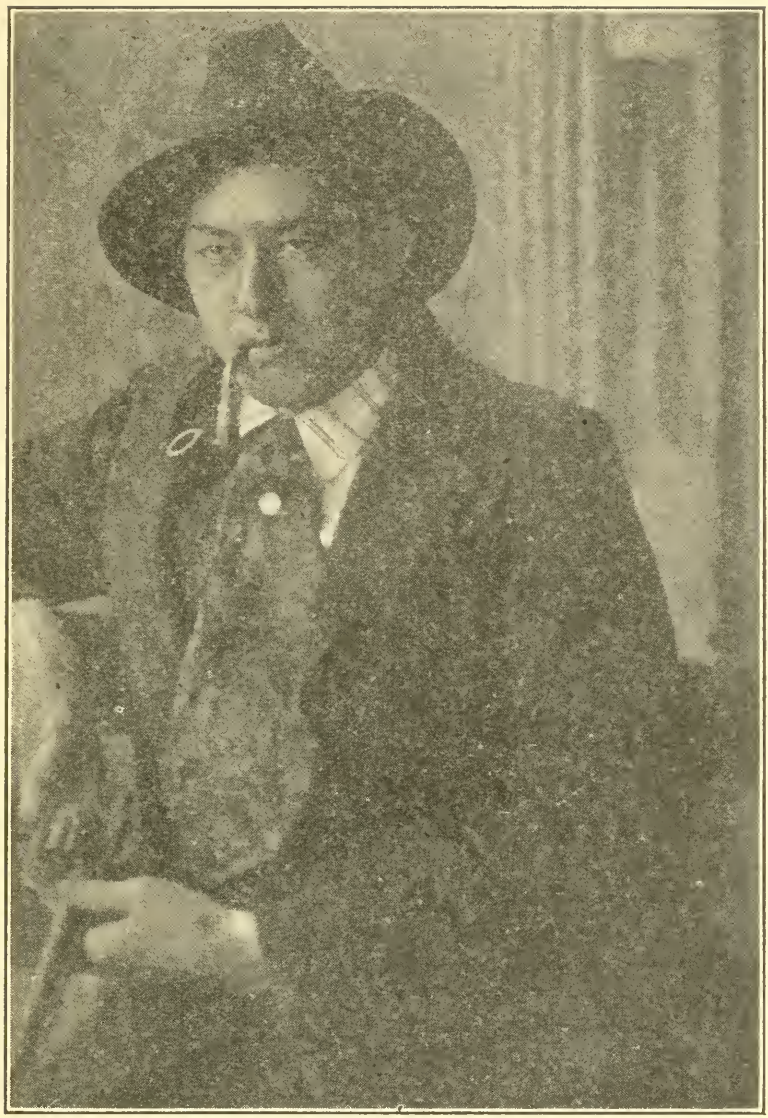
But she is gone and let's make haste
To find some one to take her place.

Ben must look round when he finishes his nap
For some old rip to help raise the crap.

When things went by contraries she did not whine
For she was anything but a bruised, weeping vine,

The praises of Medusa would be inaptly sung
That painted her a vine that clingingly clung.

She discredited Cobb for his untimely satire,
"Oh well you know how the women are,"



Ben's occupation, his only wish,
Is killin' squirrels and catchin' fish;
He is one whom the community reject,
Who prefers Moonshine to his self-respect.

She surmised that Irvin was the one lone human
Who had inadvertently loved the one wrong woman.

That Mary Robert Rhinehart's defense of her sex
Merely begged the question, serving only to vex.

That the discussion to her mind peradventure
Was fun for Irvin, for Mary quite an adventure,

She could not fathom what Mary was about
Suggesting frailties Irvin had unwittingly left out.

Literary taste has grown woefully anemic
Since the passion for mystery has become epidemic.

Medusa's imagination took a wide range
While Ben inclined to things less strange,

There was this divergence in their mental gait
Medusa traveled crooked while Ben went straight;

Or to use a figure borrowed from the hunters of Boon.
Medusa circled like a 'possum, Ben straight like a coon.

Yet when danger impended to avert disaster
She covered more ground but traveled faster,

Ben early discovered, while victrolling Carusi,
That whatever he did he could not fool Medusa.

The Wisdom of Solomon might not avail
If Medusa had a chance to tell her tale,

Ben said he felt little better than a brute
When Medusa's statement he tried to confute.

Ben was a great gamester and went a-kiting
For fun, fascination, fiddling, fishing and fighting.

A disciple of Sir Isaac he ranked first class,
He considered a creek chub the best bait for black bass.

Ben's occupation, his only wish,
Is killin' squirrels and cathin' fish,

And yet 'tis known among his kith
Ben is a person not to be trifled with;

As lad and man he inclined to sin and strife
And never did a day's work in his life.

Ben is one whom the community reject,
Who prefers Moonshine to his self-respect.

Thus it befell ere he knew what he was about
That Ben's reputation had about petered out.

He may be described as a sort of skibunk
Who never knew whether he was completely drunk,

For a month at a time he would refrain
And his self-respect he would regain.

Let no one turn from their heart's door
This short, sad, sweet annal of the poor.

She closed her eyes and went to rest,
With long shadows falling to the West,

And passed away in her little one room,
Inhaling the fragrance of wild flower bloom;

Tho oft by the wiles of the Serpent beset
She died without a single immoral regret,

Her last words, spoken to her Spiritual Adviser Jo,
Were "I'm all in, weep not for me, I'm ready to go."

While those about her did wail and weep,
Like a tired child at noon she fell asleep.

Such recluses as she was to those who knew her are
A thread o' pure gold hemming the raveled sleeve o' care.

Let each one pray for the repose of her soul
And refrain for a time from the flowin' bowl,

'Til roses red and pansies pied
Shall serve as a screen her grave to hide;

For violets blue and roses red
Are dear alike to the quick and the dead.

EPITAPH.

The odor of dead roses still permeates the gloom
Her memory abides and redolents her little one room:
The gay Cavilier is gone, his sword is rust,
But her small deeds smell sweet and bloom in the dust.

MORAL.

The Moral of this story, keep it fixed like a star,
Is that you can't mix Women, Moonshine and War;
John wrote to Medusa, his letter came from afar,
You can have War without Women but not Women without War.

AN EXPLANATION, AN APPRECIATION AND A CRITICISM

Let me tell you the wonderful story of Medusa. In the shady mountains of Kentucky, near the head of the Cumberland river, a poor, young and not unattractive mountain woman of unusual self-culture, with a no-account husband, sought a separate peace and rest thru a terrible epidemic then raging like unto the Flu. The neighbors all had it, the two children had it, and Medusa was coughing her head off and all but. She finally had it, and in her death the community, her husband and children suffered an irreparable loss and thereby hangs a tale.

To support her children and husband in his wild ways, of which there was not as usual a large number, *I mean children*, she was forced to retail Moonshine without a Government or State license to any and all who called at her humble cabin: or rather I should say that she sold the residuum that her husband left her from her meagre stock which was easily replenished for she was an honest woman and early won and long held the confidence, and I was about to say the esteem, of those who manufactured the illicit beverage. In plain parlance her credit was good.

One of her regular customers, a rough man with a poetic nature and a kind heart, after she was dead and buried, scribbled on the blank leaves of an old log book and nailed on the rude slab neath which she slept these touching, informing lines, so true, so natural and so expressive. Altho evidently improvised and unstudied, and I may say unpremedi-

tated, for no one believed that she was going to die until she had passed, the rythm seems perfect tho I am bound to admit that the metre is just a little bit faulty. At a few places even the casual reader will doubtless detect that the screw of the author's diction is loose and needs tightening. His is an intense personality and on first examining the manuscript I was struck and surprised to find a few paltry decorations and I observed in other places, not many but a few, tawdry rhetoric, and that the narrative had almost unconsciously sunk into eloquence, and what by courtesy might be called poetry, tho I hardly think so.

These homely phrases illustrate the truth and power of that classic maxim that the bravest *are* the tenderest, that the loving *are* the daring. I predict that when he wrote this hasty, unaffected tribute to the most graceful, winning woman with the merriest eyes into which he ever looked, that he builded wiser than he knew, in which respect he resembled Shakespeare, that Medusa will long stand as a model of that character of a new and compelling literature, a tender tribute voicing a personal loss of a platonic love that altered not when it lost, expressed in words of rich yet sincere, severe simplicity. In a sentence I should not be at all surprised that this Melody, for the saving of the old fashion, will give a local habitation and a name to an out-of-the-way neighborhood, that it will be a literary sensation recognized at once and long esteemed as a sort of Raw Hide classic of the rough border variety, and take its proper place where it belongs side by side with Gray's Elegy In A Country Churchyard as a new, genuine masterpiece, the first and it may be the last, expressed in the primitive Saxon-

English of the Appalachian Highlander. They are no longer the outlying Cumberlands. It is not an "arrested" but a rested civilization I am picturing; a whole people emerging with larger wealth, wider opportunities for happiness, tranquility and honorable and noble achievement.

Medusa is not expected to please those exclusive, conceited, self-sufficient egotists, political and literary amateurs, and artless fools who still entertain the heathen opinion that "No good thing can come out of Nazareth." Wise men and women know that the best thing came out of Bethlehem, a town then and now, it may be, less pretentious than Pineville where Medusa did occasional shopping. I mention this with hesitation and reverence and to give emphasis to a thought very dear to every intelligent Mountaineer. Grant said that the reason Charles Sumner did not believe the Ten Commandments was because he did not write them himself. It gives me supreme satisfaction, a pride and pleasure that I can not put into words, to enlighten and to assure the public that the history of Medusa was written by a mountaineer of mountaineers—that it is a fresh egg from the nest of the eagle that has never known cold storage save that delay occasioned by the high cost of printing, tho more than one mountaineer, with characteristic and commendable generosity and delicate and graceful tact and courtesy, offered to bear the entire expense of the publication; an offer the almost morbid, traditional pride of the mountaineer promptly declined. From a stranger the proffer would have been taken as an insult. By a strange coincidence Medusa appears from the printers the very day Kentucky became as dry as the remainder biscuit. The classic is always contemporary.

The Melody is about five times the length of the Elegy and nearly twice the length of the Rubaiyat to which it has been not inaptly likened, its extreme length being to my mind its most obvious flaw. We are told that it took Thomas Gray eight years to write the Elegy. The Rubaiyat was the life work of Mr. Edward Fitzgerald. The Melody I am credibly informed by a person present when it was written was the product of a single sitting, enlarged somewhat in its transmission on to tolerable stationary, after its rare literary merit was suspected. It was an intolerable manuscript as it came to my hand in installments and its unraveling and the deciphering of perplexing hieroglyphics required a patient care and an exertion in hot weather of which I believed myself incapable, and a literary erudition I neither possess nor affect. Nothing less than my passionate love for my native hills would have impelled me to the responsible, laborious and delicate duty imposed by the partiality of one who, when I called, never hesitated nor looked back. Its frailties are mine—its virtues all its own. Perhaps it may be better to have more matter and less art than usual.

It seems to me, and I utter it in a spirit of friendly appreciation and criticism, that he might have boiled it down, tho truth to tell and sad to say, he was probably too busy boiling something else down, it may have been a cove oyster stew or it may have been something hot in a discarded oyster can for the way of the Serpent, the Moonshiner and the Other Half is past finding out. The trick of being singular seems natural to him along with a becoming strain of rareness. It is self-explanatory, leaving nothing more to be desired and really rendering this explanation, appreciation and criticism superfluous.

As to the comparative merits of the Elegy and the Melody I do not purpose committing myself too far. I would not be, for obvious reasons, an impartial judge for my love and friendship are all with this mute, inglorious, back woods Milton who laughs and wins. Comparisons are usually odious but may I be pardoned a few personal allusions and observations since it is evidently my duty so to do. The first thing that struck me in the contrast is the alternate rhyming in the lines of the Elegy which lends elevation at the expense of a lessened force employed in the more direct method of the Melody. In artful elegance, where the consummate art is admirably concealed, the Elegy has long been and will long remain on a pedestal by itself unapproached in the Queens English; but for homely human force and apt expression it may I think be reasonably predicted that the Melody will stand equally distinguished and it may be more widely read. The interest in the Elegy is universal as is its theme and it will for a time at least attract and hold a more world-wide interest and pre-eminence but in compelling human thrill and grip, especially to the four million denizens of the new, flourishing and no longer retarded Appalachia, from Ben Ann to Loch Lomond, and the many more millions of American men and women who are interested in them as they are interested in nobody else the Melody will probably be unapproached by any narrative in the language, either poetry or prose, ancient or modern.

The friends of the Melody would probably prefer that it be contrasted with a less formidable and popular candidate for public favor. I myself prefer the Elegy, with which I cherish an older and more intimate acquaintance. I am by the Elegy like

the young lady I met at Williamsburg—a centre of highland culture—is by Shakespeare. She said to me in an earnest, candid, confidential way, that went straight to my heart, that she believed Shakespeare was good for deep people, that she liked him. I agreed with her for my impulse responded unto her own and beat in unison with the lovely landscape in which nature and much art had placed her, the center and chief adornment of the most attractive and pleasing scene imaginable. She was a school-teacher of many attractions, high culture and unusual depth, a sort o' sighing, doubting, appealing, helpless, pick-me-up-and-carry-me-away ephemeral thing altogether disassociated from the popular conception of the Boston Baked Beans variety.

The Elegy, continuing the comparison, suggests ancient, vine-clad, moss-covered churches, convents and cathedrals, enriched and adorned by the culture and conscience of centuries, while the Melody bears to us the pure, rare, fresh fragrance of wild honeysuckles covered with morning dew and wild honey and is redolent with the aroma and the delicate polka-dot tissue of the widely exploited rhododendron with which John Cox, the unmatched delineator of Mountain character, with deft, classic fingers one sweet summer day long ago wove into a modest garland and lovingly and tenderly hung it on the graceful neck of the Unerowned Queen of Buckhorn, after chastely kissing her vestal brow, all for the subterranean sinister purpose of "drawing her out" so he could put her in his book. In a sentence the Melody is more new, green and fresh, something very fresh. "The curl in the tail of the peach-orchard pig" in the Melody suggests the "Cock's shrill clarion and the echoing horn" in the Elegy.

Maud Muller's "Small tin cup" is nowise superior to "Medusa's small slim gourd."

Serious-minded young men and women who have never been about much will prefer the classic atmosphere and vernacular of the Elegy, while the gay and festive among the more mature, who are burning the candle of desire at both ends and holding on desperately to the wick, will doubtless cling for dear life to the more complex, suggestive and perplexing problems dealt with lightly and yet profoundly in the torrid atmosphere of the Melody where the scene is placed in the very heart of nature and sickled o'er with the romance that makes us young and incline to bold adventure. If I am wrong in my estimate and choice, and I confess I suspect that I am, I have the happy consolation of knowing that I err in mighty fine company and have lots of time and abundant leisure and opportunity in which to experience and confess a change of heart. To me the Melody stimulates like Shakespeare's Sonnets. The narrative recalls The Lay of The Last Minstrel while the listener would not be at all surprised at any time to see,

> Sweet Maud Muller's hazel eyes
> Look out in their innocent surprise.

The most severe, unfriendly and unsympathetic critic of Medusa will I am sure admit that she seems to possess to an unusual degree that elusive thing which no artist can catch or hold—the mystery and charm of the imperfect—the glimpse that stimulates the appetite for a glance. In support of this statement I need only recite the obvious fact revealed in this narrative that the brilliant genius of the cul-

tured John Cox paled into infatuation before the voluptuous blaze of Medusa's charms.

The spirit and brilliancy of Medusa's mother, a daughter of fair old Virginia, attracted wide attention and elicited much favorable comment from the guests of the Four Seasons Hotel out beyond Middlesborough, which she frequented under the most favorable circumstances and environment, before it proved a financial failure and was dismantled. One of the British nobility, amongst many others, was particularly struck, in fact he was almost paralyzed, and pronounced her as altogether the most beautiful and winsome woman he had ever met. He was a battle-scarred hero of England's crimson wing of Conquest and it was truthfully and aptly said of her at the time that "in her presence grim-visaged war had smoothed his wrinkled front."

For the better understanding of those interested in this biography I may say something—not much—about Ben for the simple fact that he was locally known as "Medusa's Man." On a recent ramble thru the cliffs of the Upper Cumberland I obtained thru the kind offices of a mutual friend, an introduction to that notorious and dangerous character. He was then as now an outlawed man, a refugee from justice with the price of blood upon his head. A nod, a shake of the hand, a few words and a passing glance was all I got and Ben, like a shadow, passed into still deeper shadows. I discovered him to be a typical Moonshiner of the progressive sort, quite high above and far removed from the bootlegger, with whom he is often confused by strange writers. In a sentence I may explain that no one ever suspected Ben of making more than he could himself drink. The description by the inimitable

Sheridan in his School for Scandal of one of his characters fits Ben perhaps better than any poor words of mine could. "An unforgiving eye, and a damned, disinheriting countenance" describes Ben perfectly. I think this is enough about him and I gladly dismiss him from my thoughts for he really amounts to very little anyway and it is too early, in view of the large number of his breed, to begin preserving specimens. But Medusa was altogether different, an original beauty as bright as a star.

The Melody is remarkably free from the absurd provincialisms of current highland fiction, the authors of whom seem only to picture the riff raff of that section. This fact does not indicate any perversity on the part of these foreign authors. I am hardly bold enough to aver that the riff raff everywhere are the most interesting and spectacular portion of the people. It is a fact nevertheless, but I will say that they possess a monopoly of the brains. If you don't believe it just look at the Kentucky politicians, both parties. In the Melody is thrown the glamour of limpid poesy and wild romance over the commonplace details of the every day life of the most read and talked about, interesting and striking, citizen on the American continent today—the South-Appalachian Mountaineer who furnished the finest soldier to the war of 1812, and the World War as well.

It heralds the dawn of a true, pure, up-to-date Mountain literature, disassociated from the wild, loose talk; indefensible exaggeration and commercial spirit that has tainted the spring and polluted the water. The Kentucky School Book Commission will doubtless order its insertion in the text books for advanced pupils in the Public Schools. I am advised

that the Commission will be memorialized at one of their early meetings, led it may be, by my friend Walter Hogg, Esq., a prominent Republican leader, lawyer and ornament of the Breathitt bar. At College commencements clinging girl graduates, arrayed in gauze and ostrich feathers, will substitute kindred themes, like unto Medusa, for the antiquated, threadbare thesis "Beyond the Alps lies Italy." The introduction of the Melody into the Public Schools would mark a reversion to the true, pure Saxon about which we hear so much and read so little. In it the school children will find history, tradition and strange and wild legends and thrilling adventures in love and war, which are the principal pursuits of man, intertwined, interwoven and interlaced in an original, attractive and popular manner and Mountain Methusalehs, of the John Shell variety, who never saw a railroad, will be given a thrill and live their bright, young lives over again. They will be moved to perceive that the bottom rail has at last gotten on top. It will quicken the blood in their old arteries, be the sweet solace of their declining years and retard and soften their final exit from a sinful, wicked world.

I know the author of this unique production well. He is not a school bred man in any sense of the word but he is exceedingly well read. He learned to read, and afterward to write, in a sort of Moonlight School in order to be able to express his love and admiration for the sublime and beautiful in scenic, art and other sweet stuff lying around loose in bewildering profusion, blossoming and expanding into a thousand forms of abundance. He is an optimist, a thing rare in view of the fact that he never worked for nor belonged to a corporation nor fetched nor carried for

a political machine. He thinks, and boldly avers, that there are no hills so beautiful, no mountains so sublime with unmatched tints and colors, no people so great as his own, the Scotch-Irish-Saxon mountaineer, and yet he does not take even these very seriously, but is always praising or poking fun at them. He is not a graduate of Yale or Harvard or the Kentucky University, not even a member of the Filson Club, altho I understand he aspires to that honor, and yet I challenge any College or Club man to produce Medusa's superior. He is as naked as love's sweetest singer, Robert Burns, the Mountain Song-bird of Europe, in all such superfluities. Robert Burns, the Scotch plow-boy, who dwells an arrow's flight above them all save Shakespeare. It is a fact personally known to myself that, like Medusa herself, the author of the Melody knows such trifles as the Lady of The Lake, Man Was Made To Mourn and Childe Harold by heart; but he is as ignorant of the Greek and Latin as the Greeks and Romans were ignorant of his own unlettered highland dialect. Had this obscure Mountaineer possessed the educational advantages of my nearest and dearest enemy, South Strong, Prosecuting Attorney of Breathitt by election, and King of Buckhorn by courtesy, he might have rivaled Shakespeare himself in felicity of expression. Why not? He speaks the same tongue, boasts the same blood, untainted by any inferior infusion. More's the pity. As it is we must take, con and cherish this sweet and simple annal of the Moonshiner, who is still suspected of being pretty active in back-woods Prohibition territory, and hope. and beg for more. *I mean melodies.*

I am tempted to take the public into my confidence and reveal a secret that is founded on more

than mere suspicion. It is this. The author of Medusa loved her himself with a love that passed all speech until it was too late. Such things have happened frequently. Sparrow hawks catch game where eagles dare not fly. After Medusa was married to a man much beneath herself socially and intellectually the author and Medusa made a new and important discovery, but as a matter of course his passion was hopeless for the incorrigible, unspeakable Ben was an insurmountable barrier in the way. Like the equally brilliant and more unfortunate Lord Byron, he seems to have been inspired by the genius of pain but not cynicism. Otherwise, had he married Medusa the illusion might have been marred or disappeared altogether and an unprotected public might have been spared this rambling narrative, disclosing and discussing the sweet simplicities of rural life and the gradual unfolding of a vivid revelation of mountain life, character and customs *from first hand*, linking the past to the future, and garnishing a startling story of wild romance of surpassing human interest.

This true history of Medusa was written on a crisp, icy, shivery Easter day, under the shadows of Big Black Mountain, the highest point of land in the State of Kentucky, while the year was yet young and away in the top of the tallest trees the wild birds were singing and mating and watching for their prey; the sap was rising in the birch bush, the dog-woods bursting into big bloom, destined, like the fairest flower of Clan-Cumberland, to be nipt so early; all in sight of a new-made grave on which the interrupted rays of an afternoon sun rested like a blessing and a benediction; while in the distance the yellow waves of the Cumberland river lashed, flashed, floated and

foamed, like an Alpine torrent at its height, while hard by the dashing, splashing cataract, whose roar was her childhood's lullaby, fell thundering o'er the precipice and discoursed sweet music in the glade below, music less sweet than the hushed voice, never again, in God's country, to be elevated in song and story or sunk in the low, sweet, murmured cadence of conversation so dearly and fondly remembered by the life long friend then penning her epitaph. With sudden wing the Mountain Eagle left the crest of Big Black and soared to his zenith and over all his shadow hung, and will forever hang, so long as we have free and equal men and women.

The author of Medusa tells me that this is his first transgression, that it will be his last. Furthermore of my friend, at this particular time, I am not permitted to speak. Like Junius, the real author may remain forever unknown, one of the unsolved, baffling mysteries of literature. For myself I esteem it a singular distinction and glory enough to transmit it just as it came to me to an anxious, feverish world, to protect, defend and father the bright, limpid thing until its father is found. I am glad, it may be, to rescue so much easy and graceful elegance and simplicity from oblivion and give it a place in which to sparkle and shine. My work, a labor of love, a most grateful, congenial task is finished.

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Winchester, Ky.

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